



**CGA Public Health Committee
Public Hearing March 12, 2008**

Comments On:

HB 5900 AAC Watershed Lands

HB 5903 AAC Drinking Water

Comments submitted by Cheryl Dunson, VP Public Issues

The League of Women Voters of Connecticut, a statewide organization with over 2300 members, has a **strong position in support of policies and programs that protect our state's watercourses and watershed lands. Based upon this longstanding position, the League recommends changes to HB 5900 AAC Watershed Lands and HB 5903 AAC Drinking Water.**

The League applauds the committee's understanding that we cannot take our drinking water supplies for granted and the intent to take additional steps to ensure the protection of our state's supply of drinking water for our current and future population. HB 5900, as written, targets water company land only. However, water companies solely own a portion of the land that impacts the quality and quantity of our drinking water supply. According to research conducted by the Trust for Public Land, 33% of public drinking water supply watershed lands are owned by the state or local governments or water utilities and 19% is already developed for industrial, residential or agricultural purposes. That leaves nearly half of public drinking water supply watershed lands without protection and susceptible to development. (Protecting Land to Safeguard Connecticut's Drinking Water. Trust for Public Land, 2003.)

Given that water company lands currently have statutory protections (albeit needing refinement), we urge the committee to amend HB 5900 AAC Watershed Lands to extend oversight to public drinking water supply lands as identified by the Department of Public Health. Additionally, until the Department of Public Health has adopted new procedures, the League urges consistency with our State Conservation and Development Policies Plan 2005-2010 by the adoption of an interim standard of 800 gallons of sewage production per two acres.

In relation to HB 5903 AAC Drinking Water, the League believes that a study of current restrictions "to the sale, lease, assignment or change in use of class I and Class II" lands is beneficial. We urge, however, that the committee amend the bill language to clearly reflect that the purpose of the study is to recommend strategies to enhance protections. In the decades which have passed since we instituted Class I and II protections, the work of UCONN's NEMO (Nonpoint Education for Municipal Officials) project and others has well documented that water quality deterioration can occur any time activities disturb the land or water. Although development is inevitable, the damage to our drinking water supply lands need not be if suitable protections are in place.

As noted in the State's Conservation and Development Policies Plan 2005-2010, "current and future sources of drinking water must be continuously protected from intensive development and potentially deleterious land uses." We believe that by incorporating the above recommended changes these legislative proposals will serve to protect and ensure the integrity of environmental assets critical to public health and safety.